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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SINGAPORE 000093

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [ECON](#) [SN](#)

SUBJECT: FM YEO ON U.S. ENGAGEMENT WITH EAST ASIA

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia L. Herbold. Reasons 1.4(b)(d)

11. (C) Summary: In a very cordial introductory call, Foreign Minister George Yeo sketched out for the Ambassador Singapore's hopes for a new East Asian architecture and emphasized the need for the United States to remain actively engaged with the region as it begins building this new structure. The United States' announcement, with the ASEAN leaders who participate in APEC, of the Joint Vision Statement on the ASEAN-U.S. Enhanced Partnership had been "very deft" and well received, said the Minister. Yeo urged the United States to push forward with an FTA with Malaysia and continue to improve contact and cooperation with the military and government of Indonesia. The Ambassador thanked the Minister for Singapore's support in Iraq and emphasized the positive effect a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty would have on law enforcement cooperation. She urged Singapore to continue building on our joint efforts against proliferation, and pressed Singapore to lift its ban on U.S. beef quickly. End Summary.

#### New Architecture Evolving in East Asia

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12. (C) After warmly welcoming the Ambassador to her new posting, Minister Yeo described for her an Asia that was changing rapidly, growing quickly and eagerly embracing the future. Asian parents, he said, see tremendous opportunities to better the lives of their children and are looking ahead very optimistically, especially in countries like China, India, Vietnam and Thailand. These rapid changes, however, also bring political tensions and Singapore worries about what kinds of new structures will arise to link Asia together and with the rest of the world. The "old frameworks" have outlived their usefulness, he averred. In Singapore's calculations, the ideal outcome is that the United States continues to stay firmly engaged with Asia and plays an active role in the evolution of the new framework.

#### Importance of the EAS

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13. (C) The desire to shape the future architecture in Asia drove Singapore to embrace the creation of the East Asia Summit (EAS), said Yeo. Southeast Asia had to find a way to engage with "the two behemoths" India and China as they emerged and also began to deal with each other. ASEAN had been gratified that EAS members had reached a consensus that ASEAN would "remain in the driver's seat," he said, adding that China had been very supportive of this outcome and had scored points with ASEAN delegations for being easy to work with in the run-up to the Summit. The EAS could even provide a convenient venue for increased meetings between China, Korea and Japan, and ASEAN could play a positive, neutral role in facilitating this, claimed Yeo. The EAS needs to be outward-looking. Singapore wants the United States to find ways to engage with it, he stated.

14. (C) The Ambassador pointed out that the United States had not been invited to the EAS and she asked how the Minister would propose we "engage" with it. Yeo urged the United States to "think through its attitude" toward the EAS, perhaps with a view toward an eventual observership. Short of that, the Ambassador asked, what other means of engagement would prove useful? Yeo was highly complimentary of the "deft" way the United States had brought about the Joint Vision Statement on the ASEAN-U.S. Enhanced Partnership at APEC; we had found a way to give recognition to the U.S.-ASEAN relationship, while avoiding the problems of dealing directly with Burma. This gesture had made a positive impression on friends in ASEAN. Another example, said Yeo, was the group meeting President Bush held with ASEAN leaders on the margins of the APEC Summit; these should become a regular feature each year. The United States' assistance to Indonesia after the tsunami had greatly shifted Indonesian views toward us; our increased engagement with President Yudhoyono and the Indonesian military have been a big step forward. Yeo further urged the United States to push ahead on a Free Trade Agreement with Malaysia.

#### Bilateral Cooperation

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15. (C) Turning to bilateral topics, the Ambassador expressed the United States' gratitude for the military and political support Singapore had rendered to us in Iraq as a Coalition

Partner. Yeo responded that our success in Iraq was absolutely essential. The Ambassador highlighted the importance to both sides of making progress on a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) and increasing cooperation against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Yeo acknowledged the Ambassador's point about MLAT progress being very slow and explained that Singapore remains concerned about setting precedents with us that would lead to increased demands from neighboring countries such as Indonesia. That said, he felt confident we could find ways to address each side's concerns and reach a good agreement. On proliferation, he remarked that the United States and Singapore had the same concerns and good cooperation would continue.

Beef Ban

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16. (C) The Ambassador raised the continuing ban on U.S. beef, eliciting an immediate sigh of frustration from Yeo regarding the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) -- "they have a small staff and conservative views, so they are very slow," he exclaimed. Yeo cited several instances when, as Trade Minister, he had wrangled with AVA on unreasonable bans on imports of various food items. "But now that Japan has lifted the ban, we can't lag far behind," he noted.

17. (C) In closing, the Minister went to some length to express his deep appreciation for the assistance the Embassy, the USG and the Tennessee authorities had rendered to him and his family when his son was being treated for leukemia at St. Jude Hospital in Memphis.

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